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ARE MINISTERS SLACKERS?

Ministers and theological students have been exempted from military service. This is either an insult or a challenge.

It is an insult if such exemption implies that ministers are not as ready to serve their country as other citizens, that they are slackers, or that they are so effeminate that they would not make good soldiers.

It is a challenge if it means that ministers are engaged in a work so important that the government is not warranted in calling them from it even for the defense of the nation.

The interpretation to be put upon this exemption will be determined by ministers themselves. If in the present crisis they go about their work with no increase of labor or the spirit of sacrifice, making an excuse out of a holy calling, they accept the exemption as an insult to their calling.

No minister has a right to be a religious slacker.

A church in a time of war should show a sacrificial loyalty to man and God as great as does a nation in war. For a church member to economize on the church is to brand himself not only a disloyal Christian but a disloyal citizen. By the very action of the government itself, in exempting the church's leaders, the church in the time of war is called upon to render special service to its community.

And what is this special service?

Incidentally, of course, a church can assist in the conservation campaigns, Red Cross service at home and abroad, the protection of the boys in camp from evil surroundings, maintenance of Christian work in the camps and on the battlefield. It can contribute to the increasing needs of those families who will have suffered the death of some member. Any minister who does not attempt to further this mobilization of the nation's resources is unworthy of his calling.

But there is a still greater service which the church can render—a service peculiarly its own. It is spiritual. We shall know sad days when the casualty lists are cabled across the sea. We shall need religion then.

We may see our sense of national mission and our indignation against the brutalities of our enemy developing into hatred of individuals. We shall need religion then.

We shall have moments of hesitation, doubt, it may be despair, as we think of our sons and brothers trained to kill other people, and see them actually engaged in the work. We shall need religion then.

We may have moments when we wonder whether God is really at work in his world, and whether the forces of evil have not got the better hand of him. We shall need religion then.

There will come a time when the world will have to be readjusted and peace be re-established—a time when our social problems will come to us in unaccustomed struggles and the giving of social justice demand unaccustomed sacrifices. We shall need religion then.

And we need religion now, when our new epoch and our new trials and testings are beginning to shape themselves.



Has the ministry any message for today and tomorrow?

Are our ministers to be leaders or mere markers of time?

If the latter, it were a thousand times better that every able-bodied man of them should be drafted and sent to the front in defense of ideals which demand a spiritual basis and enthusiasm to which they have refused to devote themselves.

It may be urged that such a call to increased labor and sacrifice will lead ministers to work too hard, endanger their health, induce nervous prostration.

Very well. So be it.

Only a coward refuses to face tasks that involve death.

Exemption from military service means a draft into spiritual service, and a real man will be as ready to die from overwork as from an enemy's bullet.